

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler,

I am an American particle physicist and environmental epidemiologist involved in adverse impacts of air pollution on human health at the Department of Epidemiology of Allergic and Respiratory Disease, IPLESP, INSERM and Sorbonne University in Paris, France. Much of my recent work has focused on the increased health burdens in terms of morbidity and mortality as a result of particulate matter exposure.

I am greatly disappointed at the decision to disband the Particulate Matter Review Panel. Removing specialists and their collective expertise deliberately ignores the best and most up to date scientific input, to the detriment of every American who would like to breathe clean air.

It is time for this administration to start taking both science and scientists seriously – science is not a silly hobby or some kind of diversion from other important things. Science is the method by which we understand the world and how to interact with it. Science is complex to be sure, but it is not elusive nor incomprehensible, and with the right expertise we can use it to our advantage. But science should not be used as a political weapon and it definitely should not be ignored or pushed to the side in order to advance one agenda over another. The science will actually not change – only the consequences to ourselves.

If we do not properly utilize the science we have learned regarding air pollution and its health impact - and in particular, if we do not advance in the comprehension of particulate matter and its consequences through new knowledge, then we are really wasting not only the time, money and effort that went into research in the first place, but also our daily health and human lives. Even moderate levels of air pollution knock off several months to years to life expectancy – including yours, by the way, and everyone in the EPA and everyone in the Trump administration as well (Thurston et al. 2017).

What should be happening is not only a reinstatement of the panel, but also efforts to strengthening the Clean Air Act and a reduction in the acceptable levels of particulate matter to coincide with new research, which suggests they are still too high in terms of optimal health. A panel of experts on ozone is also required, as impacts from ozone will only continue to get worse through increases in temperature, whether you believe in climate change or not.

Other countries are taking the threat of air pollution seriously. Efforts have been stepped up recently specifically on the topic of air pollution and health by the WHO, who held their first conference dedicated to the topic at the end of October this year. Here in Paris, the city is making many changes in order to prioritize the health of its citizens over toxic sources of particulate matter. But as an American in Europe, I can see, smell and breathe the significant difference between our clean air at home and the diesel-laden European air not regulated by the Clean Air Act. By not taking these steps years ago, like we did, they continue to pay the price in terms of health, excess health care costs and years of life lost. The higher air pollution levels in Europe show what developed countries look like without very strict air quality standards.

It makes absolutely no sense to reduce the strength of expertise focused on such an impactful issue. Please re-instate the Particulate Matter Review Panel and commit to strengthening current air quality restrictions for a healthier and cleaner United States.

Thank you,

Cara Nichole Maesano, Ph.D.
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